

Assessment and achievement

The collection and analysis of achievement data has become a widespread and influential practice in schools in England and many student teachers may be exposed to this during their teaching placements. At present, data collection nationally records aspects of pupil's backgrounds such as ethnicity, gender and whether they are learners of EAL. This has provided educationalists with evidence concerning the influence of these background factors on educational performance. For example [Ethnicity and Education: the evidence on minority ethnic pupils](#) (DfES, 2005) and the [2006 update](#), presents the statistics relating to the minority ethnic school population in England and outlines data relating to: achievement; attendance and exclusions; special educational needs; parental involvement and the ethnic background of teachers.

In multilingual schools and local authorities it is common to collect and use EAL levels or stages to contextualise pupil achievement data and many have noted strong relationships between the stages of language acquisition and educational attainment and in particular between language stage and performance at GCSE when other background variables are controlled.

Government publications have strongly recommended the use of achievement data to 'target' EAL learners in schools and classrooms. For example, *The Assessment of pupils learning English as an additional language* (DfES, 2003) recommends teachers gather and use data such as gender, age, ethnicity, prior education, years of UK education, first language details including literacy, key stage test results and cognitive ability test scores to decide on appropriate action for individual bilingual pupils.

This approach has been criticised by Barwell who notes that

the examples of how assessment information is used are related to pupil management rather than classroom practice. Information is used to select forms of additional support (e.g. an induction programme for new arrivals) or to set targets for pupils. The guidance does not, therefore, appear to have taken on board research showing the significant benefits of formative assessment. Indeed the tone of the booklet is one of management and control, a teacher-centred, data driven, target-setting approach to education, which de-personalises both teachers and pupils. Thus the pupil-friendly principles mentioned at the start (e.g. engagement) do not feature elsewhere in the booklet. Similarly, the collection of background data on pupils' 'first language' serves no purpose. One case study mentions that this kind of information was effectively disseminated, but there is no indication of what this might be used for. (Barwell, 2004, p. 38)

More recent publications on the assessment of pupils for whom English is an additional language have shown a similar reliance on quantitative rather than qualitative data. For example, in the 2005 DfES EAL assessment guidance, specialists are warned that 'However the information is gathered, the initial assessment profile should only provide necessary background information together with levels of academic performance.' (DfES, 2005 p. 8) This rather reduced view of assessment is often felt by professionals to be inconsistent with pedagogically sensitive assessment practice.

References

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